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ABSTRACT

A study of the counseling centers of public community colleges in the Southwest was conducted to determine the characteristics and duties of counseling personnel, the types of services provided, and counselors' perceptions of students' most prevalent concerns. All community colleges in Arizona (N=15) and Nevada (N=4) and six institutions in New Mexico were selected for the study; 18 colleges responded to the study survey. The survey revealed that: (1) the counseling centers employed a total of 103 professional personnel, of whom 10% held doctoral degrees, 6.7% were part-time employees, and 55% were males; (2) overall, counselor staff spent 64% of their time counseling, 13.6% teaching, 3.4% in workshop activities, and 15.6% in administrative duties; (3) all respondents indicated they offered academic, vocational, and transfer counseling, and all but one offered personal counseling; (4) academic concerns were perceived to be students' most prevalent concerns, followed by vocational problems, the tendency to drop out, interpersonal concerns, and financial worries; (5) no pattern was evidenced in tactics used to acquaint students with available services; (6) only five respondents engaged in client follow-up; and (7) career planning, academic counseling, and counseling of disadvantaged and mature students emerged as the three areas recommended for prospective community college counselors to study. (AYC)

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A SURVEY OF COUNSELING CENTERS AT PUBLIC COMMUNITY COLLEGES IN NEW MEXICO, NEVADA, AND ARIZONA

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INTRODUCTION

The following study was an attempt to assess the counseling centers of public community colleges in the states of New Mexico, Nevada, and Arizona. Since the community college entity has come of age in the last ten to fifteen years as a viable training facility in the United States, much emphasis has been placed in the research on its flexibility and adaptability to the growing educational needs of American society. Concurrently, little space has been given to the interaction of the counseling center with the community college population. The few studies done seem to indicate a need for the generation of more data which will, hopefully, paint a clearer overall picture.

There have been three nationwide studies done since 1970 which have some bearing on the present study. Hinko (1971) surveyed 111 community junior colleges having an enrollment of 5,000 or more students. His findings indicated that 1.) the typical director was a white male who was 42 years of age and had a master's degree in counseling and guidance; 2.) the typical staff had 6 to 10 counselors who earned between $14,000 and $16,000 a year; 3.) the average counselor-student ratio was 1:400-600; and, 4.) the effectiveness of counseling programs was hindered by lack of sufficient personnel and an adequate budget. Brook and Avila (1973) surveyed the chief student-personnel administrators in 478 two-year institutions. They found that 89% of the respondents were male while 11% were female. Further, the survey revealed that 24% held doctorates, 73% held master's, and 3% held bachelor's degrees. Wolf and

Dameron (1975) surveyed 50 two-year and 50 four-year colleges to see if there was a difference in counseling approaches. They concluded that the community college appeared to need counseling oriented towards advisement.

Two regional surveys have been conducted since 1970 which are also of interest. Goodman, Beard, and Martin (1975) surveyed 140 two-year institutions in the Southeast. They found that 1.) the median counselor student ratio was 1:338; 2.) 76% of respondents engaged in follow-up study; and, 3.) 67% of the directors held master's; 16% held Ph.D.'s, 14% held Ed.D's and 3% held bachelor's degrees. Miller (1977) conducted a survey of 16 two-year colleges in New York, New Jersey, and Connecticut. Her findings showed that 1.) centers supplemented their staffs with paraprofessionals; 2.) two-thirds of the respondents employed at least 1 Ph.D.; and, 3.) personal, vocational, and academic concerns were the most prevalent among the student population.

The present study is a follow-up of the above six studies in an effort to compile some data on counseling centers at two-year colleges in the Southwest. A 13 item questionnaire was designed to 1.) describe counseling personnel and their duties; 2.) indicate the type services offered; and, 3.) indicate the concerns most prevalent among the clientele. Twenty-five institutions were selected from the Education Directory, Colleges and Universities 1980-81 to participate in the survey to include the 15 public community colleges in Arizona and the four public community colleges in Nevada. Only six institutions were selected from New Mexico because, in the researcher's view, the other two-year institutions showed

no two-year occupational programs. Eighteen (72%) usable questionnaires were returned (ten from Arizona institutions, five from New Mexico, and three from Nevada).

RESULTS

The first six items on the questionnaire related to counseling personnel (see Table 1). It was found that only one of the respondent New Mexico colleges had a counselor with a Ph.D. All had at least one male and one female counselor. None utilized peer or intern counselors and only two employed a paraprofessional. On the other hand, two of the three Nevada institutions had Ph.D. personnel; however, one did not have a female counselor. As common in the New Mexico schools, none utilized peer or intern counselors, and only one employed a paraprofessional. Three of the Arizona schools had Ph.D. and paraprofessional personnel while four institutions had peer counselors and one employed an intern. The average counselor-student ratios were 1:544 for New Mexico respondents and 1:992 and 1:556 for Nevada and Arizona respondents, respectively.

Overall, of the 103 professional personnel revealed through the survey, 10% had Ph.D.'s and 87% had master's. Of those, only 6.7% were part-time and 45% were female. Paraprofessionals, peer, and intern counselors were used sparingly. While six respondents either inserted N/A or zero in response to the question regarding academic rank, of the 12 respondents, 47 held academic rank.

One of the six items asked respondents to indicate the percentage of time spent on various duties. Of the 18 centers, only two had non-teaching personnel. All but one spent a percentage of time on administrative duties (see Table 2). Personnel at ten institutions spent from one

Table 1. Counseling Personnel at Selected Institutions.

INSTITUTION		COUNSELORS					DEGREES		SEX		RATIO
		Professional		Paraprofessional	Peer	Intern	Ph.D's	Master's	Male	Female	Counselor/Student
		F.T.	P.T.								
	A	3	-	-	-	-	1	-	1	2	1:600
NEW	B	1	1	-	-	-	-	2	1	1	1.5:1300
MEXICO	C	4	-	-	-	-	-	4	3	1	1:250
	D	3	-	1	-	-	-	2	3	1	1:300
	E	14	-	2	-	-	-	14	7	7	1:400
	F	9	-	1	-	-	1	8	4	5	1:1400
NEVADA	G	6	4	-	-	-	1	9	4	6	1:1200
	H	1	1	-	-	-	-	2	2	-	1:375
	I	9	1	-	-	-	4	6	6	4	1:17
	J	6	-	-	8	-	-	6	4	2	1:300
	K	5	-	-	-	-	-	5	3	2	1:1000
	L	8	-	-	4	-	-	8	4	3	1:118
ARIZONA	M	4	-	1	-	-	-	4	2	2	1:225
	N	4	-	-	-	2	-	4	3	1	1:300
	O	3	-	-	-	-	1	2	3	-	1:1000
	P	3	-	2	11	-	-	3	2	1	1:600
	Q	5	-	1	-	-	-	5	3	2	1:1300
	R	7	-	-	2	-	1	6	3	4	1:1000

Table 2. Percentage of Time Spent by Personnel per Week in Prescribed Duties.

		% Counseling	% Teaching	% Workshop	% Administration	% Other
	A	75	10	0	15	0
New Mexico	B	50	10	5	35	0
Institutions	C	90	10	0	0	0
	D	50	0	0	50	0
	E	97	0	1	2	0
Nevada	F	60	0	10	30	0
Institutions	G	70	20	5	5	0
	H	50	5	0	45	0
	I	65	15	3	10	7
	J	50	15	10	10	15
	K	80	20	0	0	0
	L	60	20	10	10	0
Arizona	M	50	35	0	15	0
Institutions	N	85	5	0	15	0
	O	70	10	2	10	8
	P	25	35	10	15	15
	Q	85	15	0	25*	0
	R	50	20	5	10	15

*1 counselor does this job.

to ten hours a week administering some form of workshop training. Overall, counseling personnel spent 64% of their time counseling, 13.6% teaching, 3.4% in workshop activity, 15.6% in administrative duties, and the remainder in other unspecified duties.

The question regarding services offered at community college counseling centers asked the respondents to choose from a list of 18 functions (Table 3). All respondents indicated that they offered academic, vocational, and transfer counseling. All but one offered personal/emotional counseling. Marriage and family, group, veterans, and financial aid counseling, as well as services for the handicapped, mature adults, and individuals in crises were offered by the majority of the counseling centers. Based on the 18 choices, the respondents averaged 10.7 functions per center. A number of respondents stated that they offered referral service to community agencies for functions not covered by their centers.

A list of 14 concerns prevalent among community college students was offered and participants were asked to rank these concerns from one (high) to 14(low) according to the needs of their populations. Academic concerns were the most prevalent followed, respectively, by vocational problems and the tendency to drop-out, interpersonal concerns and financial concerns. The following categories exhibited no particular order: anxiety, heterosexuality, alcohol, drug abuse, racial/cultural, health, psychosomatic, and depression. Many respondents chose not to rank beyond four or five.

There was no particular pattern evident in response to the question regarding tactics used to acquaint students with available services.

Table 3. Services Offered by Counseling Centers.

Counseling Services	New Mexico					Nevada			Arizona									
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	P	Q	R
Academic	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Financial				X	X		X	X		X		X		X		X	X	
Veterans				X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X				X	X	
Vocational	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Transfer	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Handicap					X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X			X	X
Speech & Hearing					X													X
Personal/Emotional		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Marriage/Family			X		X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
High School Relations	X	X		X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X
Crisis Intervention			X				X	X	X	X		X	X				X	X
Group			X				X		X	X		X	X	X	X		X	X
Feminist Therapy							X	X			X						X	X
Student Run								X				X						
Mature Adults	X				X		X	X	X	X	X	X			X	X		X
Community	X						X	X	X		X	X	X					X
Evening	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Computer Assisted	X	X	X		X			X			X	X						
Other								X	X*									

*Career & Placement

Responses ranged from "required meetings with counselor" to "campus information."

Surprisingly, only five of the 18 respondents engaged in follow-up study on their clients. However, 15 stated that they solicited periodic evaluations by students while 13 also solicited faculty appraisal.

Participants were finally asked to offer recommendations to prospective community college counselors on course of study. Three areas of emphasis emerged: 1.) career planning/vocational counseling; 2.) academic counseling; and, 3.) counseling of the disadvantaged and mature adult student. A sizable percentage stated that personal/therapeutic type counseling should be deemphasized. Two respondents remarked that such cases are generally referred to community mental health services.

DISCUSSION

Since the nature of community colleges depends so much on the local communities, it is difficult to make an assessment without knowledge of the particular communities and their needs, as well as the intricacies of the respective institutions. Though the writer hesitates to draw any conclusions based on the above data, the results permit some tentative observations.

The 18 institutions showed a sparsity of Ph.D., paraprofessional and peer counselors. Only 33% of the respondents retained Ph.D. personnel while the range of counseling was basically comparable. While the counselor-student ratios were exorbitant when compared with other studies,

paraprofessionals and peer counselors were almost non-existent. It is doubtful that these ratios were arrived at systematically. Perhaps future studies will assess the quality of counseling offered under these circumstances.

While ratios reveal the counseling attention given the population by the institution, the amount of time spent per week in actual counseling portrays the interest of the counseling center. Though a typical week is not indicative of the percentage of time spent in counseling during peak periods such as registration, these rough approximations for a number of centers reveal a lack of time spent in this area. It is reasonable to expect personnel hired as counselors to work at least 50% (preferably, 70% to 80%) of their time in some counseling activity to include teaching and workshops when applicable.

The need for more emphasis on follow-up study is evident. Granted, periodic evaluations present the centers with some feedback; however, short-term follow-up on clients would offer a better picture of the overall effectiveness and adequacy of the counseling process.

There was much consistency among respondents in answer to the question on student concerns. This point was corroborated by the recommendations for more emphasis in counselor training on vocational and academic counseling, and services to the disadvantaged and mature adult student.

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